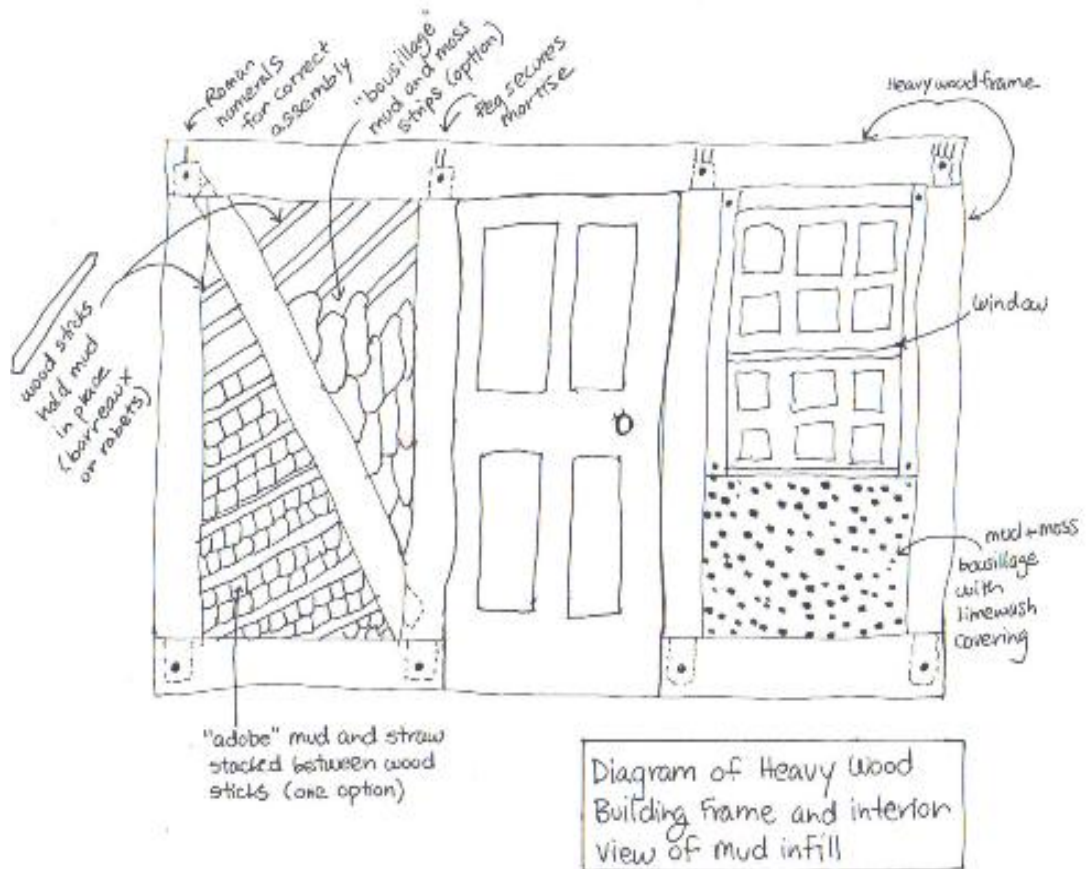




Mud-walled Buildings at Cane River Creole NHP: What on Earth?

Did you know about two-thirds of the World's population live in earth-walled houses? This is surprising, since most of us live in houses made of industrially-created materials and we assume everyone else does, too. But modified dirt is a good insulator and is an inexpensive material when labor is cheap. We are lucky at Cane River Creole NHP to have different types of mud infill

Bousillage is what this mud infill is called in Louisiana. It's held in place by sticks wedged between the wood wall framing. Small lumps made of mud and grass or cotton stalks infill the framing at the Oakland Plantation Cook's Cabin, parts of the Main House, and Doctor's House. At the Cook's Cabin, gently undulating walls were lime washed and after the Civil War covered with nailed-on wallpaper. Wall repairs in that building contain Spanish moss. This type of wall also appears in the closet



Mud and Spanish moss is the more usual type of timber infill Louisiana natives know as bousillage. Bousillage is made with long strips of mud and Spanish moss, and can be seen at the Oakland Plantation East and West Pigeonnaires, Overseer's House, the North Slave/Tenant Cabin, and breakfast room in the Main House; and at Magnolia Plantation in the Overseer's House and Blacksmith's Shop.

In addition, the Carpenter's Shop at Oakland features mud and moss infill between the horizontal cypress logs. For another twist, according to archaeologist Nick Laraquenta, the Blacksmith's Shop at Magnolia was repaired with a mud and manure mixture. That building also highlights historic worker hand-prints captured in the mud.

Earth-walled houses were built in Natchitoches Parish until the early 1900s, but changes in house preferences and the loss of trained workers spelled the eventual end of earth architecture as practiced by the peoples here on Cane River.

For more information, see Carolyn Well's 1973 Domestic Architecture of Colonial Natchitoches, M. A. thesis, Northwestern State University at Natchitoches, La., and Jay D. Edward's A Creole Lexicon: Architecture, Landscape,